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Teaching Writing to Children and Adolescents

Argumentative Essay

Creativity: More Important than Spelling

Creativity is defined as “the ability to transcend traditional ideas, rules, patterns, [and] relationships…and to create meaningful new ideas, forms, and methods” (Dictionary.com). Our society was built on the idea that people could do anything they put their minds to. This is evident in everything around us, from the most important medicines to the most entertaining video games, but without creative people, none of this would exist. These people once had teachers who hopefully told them they could do anything and for this reason creativity is the most important skill a teacher can pass on to her students. Without creativity, our society is a much less exciting place.

Creativity can be seen as a group of characteristics including “curiosity, risk-taking, focus, self-motivation, cleverness, and a sense of wonder” (Wilcox 1). These characteristics are sometimes inherited, but more often they are learned. Teachers should be modeling these behaviors and creating assignments and assessments that allow students to practice these skills. Adults do not live their lives by a specific set of rules, but instead create a life within the laws that society, a group of creative men and women, have laid out for them. Without creativity we would live in a world where everyone was the same, where there was no poetry, no medicine, no machines, and quite frankly no America. Standardized testing and No Child Left Behind are stripping our teachers of their ability to teach students the most important skills of all, those seen in our world’s most creative people. Instead teachers focus on things like spelling and capitalization, which are important, but what is more important?

In “Making Mistakes, Creating Metaphors,” Robert Wallace discusses teaching poetry to a 3rd grade class. At one point he discusses a student named Sharon who was “so focused on writing neatly and spelling everything correctly that” she could not just let the “words flow” (11). Students are so concerned with being right, that they forget to think for themselves. As teachers we often focus on the wrong things. We check spelling, grammar, and correct formatting, but of all the things taught in the classroom, and although these things are important, at no point should they be put ahead of children’s creativity. There should not be so much emphasis on writing neatly and spelling correctly that a child finds it impossible to write a poem.

Some will argue that students must learn their sight words and need to learn the proper way to write letters in order to learn to read and write all the creative things that have been produced before them. However, establishing an environment where these most basic fundamentals are made the most important things students learning does not “cultivate, nurture, and encourage [creative] growth” (Wilcox 1). It’s this type of thinking, that “school is rules” and “school is restrictive,” that causes about 30,000 students to drop out of high school in the United States every year. “Perhaps we can begin to change the kind of thinking *about* school by changing the kind of thinking we *do* in school” (Wilcox 2). A simple lesson search on Pinterest would generate thousands of creative activities in any number of subjects created by teachers who want their students to enjoy the time they spend in the classroom. This should be the goal of teachers, not worrying about things like “highly effective” or creating “proficient” learners.

“At any level, teaching should be an adventure,” (Schramm) but so should learning. Like adventures, being in the classroom should be a little scary, but also exciting! Encouraging creativity in our classrooms requires teachers to release power and instill in the students this “learning is exciting” mentality. These lessons are the most important because in the future, as adults, these students will have to make choices and choose paths for themselves. Without creativity some will have difficulty navigating themselves on their adventures. This would be the biggest disservice of all. For me, I would rather have a student who does not spell every word correctly with sloppy handwriting who may one day find a cure for cancer because he or she thought outside the box. As a teacher, that would be the greatest A+ of all.

Works Cited

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